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ABSTRACT

With an ethnographic approach, this paper focused on the process of students' learning. It examines students' feelings about learning environments and expectations of college education, as well as professors' experiences with college teaching and their views of teachers' role in contemporary society. Unstructured, intensive interviews were conducted with four instructors and four students. Students' views supported P.G. Loves' claim (1995) that integrating intellectual, social, and emotional aspects in undergraduate student lives would increase their learning effectiveness. Professors showed their support to Constructivism. However, there seemed a gap existing between students' demand upon professors' attention and professors' requirement of students' motivation. How to bridge the gap needs further study. (Contains 22 references.) (Author/RS)

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Teaching and Learning As Communication: A Cultural Approach

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Being aware of the increased needs for a student-centered learning environment, researchers have become interested in studies taking students' perspectives into account in order to enhance teaching-learning effectiveness (Chism, 1994; Hohn, 1995; Menges, Weimer, & , 1996; Weimer 1996). They emphasize that the issues of teaching and learning should be discussed in larger contexts and that instructors are responsible for understanding these changes in higher education and making teaching more learning-oriented. In order to better understand students' educational needs establishing a two-way communication between the two parties is an essential context of students' learning (Fisch, 1996; Love & Love, 1995).

This paper examines the communication between teachers and students, or teaching and learning, from the perspective of cultural studies. It emphasizes the process of students' learning and the experience of college teaching rather than students' outcomes and teaching strategies. The research focus is on students' interactive relationship with instructors/professors, their feelings about learning environments, expectations of college education, etc., as well as feelings of instructors/professors toward their students, their efforts in trying to understand students, their views of the teacher's role in contemporary society. In the following discussion, the terms of instructor, professor, and teacher will be used interchangeably.

To examine the culture in college classrooms, the current study employed a qualitative

research approach. It provides robust information about the experiences of contemporary college students and their professors, discusses relevant theories and practices, and raises questions for further studies. It is believed that the present study will enrich the stock of knowledge in both communication and education studies.

Literature Review

Education as Communication, as Culture

It is well known that *Education* is, as shown in the Dictionary, "instruction or training by which people learn to develop and use their mental, moral and physical powers" (1989, p. 298). It apparently puts the entity "people" as active learners at the center of the education process. In fact, teaching, as instruction or training, is a means that students use to learn in order to reach their goals, or the ends -- acquiring knowledge or skills, and gaining experience (p.562).

Further, education is an important part of culture. *Culture* always involves "the training and development of the mind...the refinement of taste and manners acquired by such training" (1989, p. 235). Dewey (1954) advocates having a "systematic expenditure of public funds for scientific inquiry into the conditions which affect the mental and moral development of children" (p. 198). And he emphasizes to develop educational methods that "would release new potentialities, capable of all kinds of permutations and combinations, which would then modify social phenomena, while this modification would in its turn affect human nature and its educative transformation in a continuous and endless procession" (p. 199).

Education occurs via various levels of communication, including mass communication (such as mass lectures, performances, open universities); organizational communication (instructors and students as interdependent groups in an education system); group communication (such as seminars, class presentations and discussions, debates, sports); interpersonal communication (such as assignments, exams, individual conferences); intrapersonal communication (encoding/creating message, and decoding/interpreting other's message). Learning is a dynamic and continuous process in human society, as well as in an individual's life span. School is a key element in societies, where both teaching and learning efforts contribute to students' acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experience. From the perspective of

communication, teaching is not just "imparting," "sending," "transmitting," or "giving" knowledge to students (Carey, 1989, p.15). Teaching and learning are not two separate processes. Instead, the meaning of teaching only exists where/when there is a need of learning. Teaching and learning must link together in the sense of "sharing," "participation," "association" and understanding, in order to reach the goal of teaching and learning effectively (Carey, 1989; Menges, Weimer, & Associates, 1996).

Integrating Intellectual, Social, and Emotional Aspects of Learning

Love and Love (1995) advocate "the need to focus on holistic learning—the integration of intellectual, social, and emotional aspects of undergraduate student learning" (p. iii), and critique that "focusing solely on cognitive or intellectual development and ignoring social and emotional influences on the learning process reduces the effectiveness of teaching" (p. 43). They believe that social contexts in/out of classrooms, interpersonal relationships with instructors, and emotions/moods, often correlate to students cognitive skills and learning motivations (Boekaerts, 1993; Goleman, 1995; Love & Love, 1995; Magolda, 1992; Peterson & Seligman, 1984; Sylvester, 1994). Love and Love promote *liberation theory* as a basis for educators' practice. *Liberation theory* emphasizes participation, partnership, and dialogue that require establishing a conscious relationship between students and educators, based on mutual expectations and responsibilities.

Understanding Students' Needs and Facilitating Students' Participation

Students pursue higher education for various purposes. Although the majority of college students traditionally come from high schools, more and more non-traditional students join in the student body of higher education. With increasing costs of higher education, college students are also part of the working force in American society. Weimer (1996) notices that "student life is a web of interconnected experiences, influences, and activities, all of which overlap, relate, contradict, and otherwise interact in very complicated ways" (p.3). She points out that the "emphasis on [teaching] technique trivializes the rich complexity" of teaching contexts and circumstances, and neglects "who our students are and how they learn" (Weimer, 1996, p. 5).

Perry questions the teachers' role. He writes, "the connection between teaching and

motivation related directly to what teachers see as their primary role" (Perry, Menec, & Struthers, 1996, p. 76). He criticizes the focus on passing knowledge to students and promotes the way to teach students by knowing who they are and what they want to learn.

Jackson (1993) favors the *Constructivist approach*. It requires educators to "provide a learning environment in which students search for meaning, appreciate uncertainty, and inquire responsibly" (p. v). This kind of environment will "result in [students'] long-term understanding and ability to use the concepts and information out of the classroom" (Love & Love, 1995, p.48).

With the increasing enrollment of minority, non-traditional, and international students, Chism (1996) argues that to accommodating different cultures instructors need to pay attention to "nonverbal, empathic, visual, symbolic, or nuance communication" and enhance "the social process by which interpersonal communication, influence, consensus, and commitment are included in problem solving" (p.230).

Their experience and progress working with diverse groups indicate that to understand students, professors need to recognize the differences among college students and play the teachers' role with a cultural perspective.

Research Questions

As described above, teaching is as a communication practice and the classroom is as a cultural environment. Creating a proper classroom culture may enhance students' learning process. The relationship between teaching and learning is not a one-way communication, professors delivering lectures and students taking notes. Instead, it is a process of two-way communication based on mutual understanding between an instructor and his/her students, and students' active participation in the communication. The major research questions for this study are:

1. What kind of relationship between an instructor/professor and students may enhance students' learning process?
2. What are students' perspectives of college education? What are instructors'/professors' experiences of college teaching?

Research Method

In order to better understand teaching and learning process, and students' and instructors' expectations and feelings toward college education, the present study employed an ethnographic approach at a Midwest state university. Lindlof explains that ethnography "usually involves a holistic description of cultural membership...tries to describe all relevant aspects of a culture's material existence, social system, and collective beliefs and experiences" (1995, p.20).

Thus, class observations, unstructured intensive interviews with professors and students were mainly employed for the exploration. During the research, the author's working experience as a teaching assistant, a graduate instructor, and an assistant professor in college education facilitated the conversations with the people being studied, and promoted their cooperation with the researcher.

Based on existing studies, the interviewing questions were developed. Through unstructured, intensive interviews with four instructors and four students, the author's gain knowledge about student learning environments and learning-teaching relationships in contemporary higher education. All the instructors interviewed had received good teaching evaluations. Among them three were full professors with more than 15 years teaching experiences and one was an associate professor with more than ten years teaching experiences. The student interviewees had different backgrounds. One was a non-traditional student who was a veteran of the Persian Golf War and still serving in the National Guard. One was a transfer senior student from a local community college. One was the vice president of the student government at the university, and the other was an athlete on the university track team. The paper attempts to describe "all relevant aspects of" the culture existing in the classroom that both students and instructors experience in contemporary college education. And the discussion is focused on the teaching-learning relationship that would enhance students' learning processes.

Data analysis

What kind of relationship between an instructor/professor and students may enhance students' learning process?

During the interviews, both students and professors often referred to the other party. When the relationship question came up, it took them a few minutes to organize their thoughts about this issue. Regarding the relationship between professors and students, they all were concerned with students' learning processes.

Students' Perspectives

Sharing, association, and connection

Students appreciated professors' openness to their different views, and some interpersonal contact, such as office hours, easy going personalities. The vice president of student government, believed that *knowing professors' expectations* was definitely important for students' success, and that *mutual understanding* between professors and students would promote students' learning process. She said:

> I think that they [professors] should tell us who they are, what their life experiences [have been]. That helps us to understand them better. Their teaching theory, the way that they teach, why they are teaching this class....Everyone understands everyone better, you get to know people. Students make friends and acquaintances on campus. It really helps the classroom feel more like a family rather than a bunch of strangers in the class.

The transferred student also emphasized students' positive attitudes toward professors. She argued that "Education, at least, [involves] getting to know your professors, being able to talk to them. If you don't take that step, you are not going to [learn] either." On the other hand, they claimed that it was professors' responsibility for *involving students* in classroom activities and *connecting their minds to students*. The transferred student explained the situation:

> If they [students] don't say anything, you can ask them. If they don't respond to you, that's their problem, not your responsibility....[because] some students are not used to college. It took me three years to speak up in class because I wasn't sure what I had to

say was going to be the smartest thing....[When] I got a new class I felt comfortable in, I finally spoke up. I ended up getting a very good grade because I did it, because the teacher influenced me to say something. Some teachers don't, they don't connect to students. They need to connect their mind to students. Otherwise students don't know what's going on.

The track athlete, who was very serious about her academic performance, believed that instructors need to *make teaching a priority*. She complained about her first year experience:

> The first year I had a teacher who regularly canceled classes. She had office hours. A lot of people were there, [but] she wouldn't be there. I called her and left a message on her answering machine [but] she wouldn't return the call. She set up time to work with you. You went there but she wouldn't show up. That was really frustrating....She kept her distance from the class. I really didn't learn a lot. She expected a lot from the class but we couldn't expect a lot from her. She didn't follow the syllabus very well...Those kinds of things made me look down [on her]...She said she didn't come because she was caught up by something. It [teaching] wasn't her priority. That really made me feel like I shouldn't make this class a priority because it wasn't one of the teacher's priorities. My grade suffered from that. I didn't know what else I could do.

Further, students were very sensitive to professors' *attitudes* toward students' needs, problems, and confidentiality regarding their academic performances. The transferred student said that she really needed the professors' assurance that she was doing OK. She used "uncles and aunts" to define teachers' roles in a student's life, and said:

> Teachers are like uncles and aunts. You are not telling them [students] how to live their life. You are not responsible for how they live their life. As a teacher, you've got to guide them to the right direction of the subject matter, to make sure this person is learning something as you go, to help initiate the student's reaction to you and to the subject matter you're giving him. If a student comes to say "I have a problem, you need to help me," you help him.

When the question whether professors need to discover students' talent or abilities for

learning was asked, she replied:

> Discovering, it is not necessary but noticing it, seeing it's there and helping students to see they have it. It is necessary....Students are not sure because the teacher hasn't said anything to them....I wasn't sure I was doing good, I had to ask if I wanted to know. Some students are just too afraid to ask....[Teachers should] let them [students] know, in some way, they're doing OK, and how they're doing.

Professors' Perspectives

Constructivism

The vocabulary that frequently appeared in the professors' discourse included "sharing," "open mind," "working together" or "learning together," "collaborative" or "constructive," "connection," "facilitator," "mentor," "sensitivity," "awareness," "differences," and such. From their successful teaching experiences, they perceived that it is the interactive relationship that facilitates students' learning. A professor who has taught mass lectures for years described:

> It should be a shared relationship where we are all teaching and learning at the same time. I believe in the title 'teacher', I don't think I can teach anything if you don't want to learn. I can help you to learn, I can guide you to learn. You have to do the learning but I can provide the opportunities, situations, activities that will enhance that....We're working together....if I find out what helps you....What I think the role teacher-student could be is a collaboration, as a part of the learning process.

Another professor who was used to teaching small classes came to the same conclusion:

> The terminology is constructivist classroom. I totally believe that we do co-construct meaning and learning. Of course, the primary teacher is teacher and the learner is student. There is a whole lot of back and forth. The teachers are continually learning too, and together we are making meaning, which is a view of communication. I think that really plays out in the classroom all the time....You can't really teach anybody anything they don't want to learn. [If] they don't, that's an individual thing. But I can make it easier, or I can facilitate their learning.

Her teaching philosophy not only deals with teaching subject matters but is also concerned

about students as human beings. She said:

> There is a book entitled Students are Real People...who happen to be students at the moment. They are other things too, a mother, a lover, a future doctor...I hope they think about me, I'm not just a teacher either, I'm a person too. I think the relationship is person to person, but we have separate roles.

Therefore, the common basis of co-construction exists. She believed:

> We are two humans, two people, working on a project which is learning about something together. And we are both doing things to help each other to accomplish that. And making the goals clear to each other, the explanations clear, and assignments clear. And the students then take their responsibilities making clear what they need, what they want, and what they don't understand and how I can be helpful. So, the old phrase was the facilitator of learning. I still like that too....I think we do facilitate learning. That's the role I see for myself.

Mentoring relationship

The other professor saw the teacher's role as a mentor of students rather than merely passing on knowledge to students. He related teaching in the classroom to the larger context, i.e. communities, society, and the world. He said:

> Both [teacher and students] are connected to the acquisition, understanding, interpretation of knowledge. What I don't believe is that the professor/instructor, from the top of mountain, speaks words of wisdom, and delivers knowledge to students. I mean that's very negative. I believe it has to be an interactive process. The professor provides information, a framework by which learning can occur and then a stimulating-environment would be an interactive situation between students and a professor. For me, you can go from the concrete, the specific focus content on the table and go beyond to other levels. In terms of the relationship between the two, I believe there should be a mentoring relationship....I think ultimately both parties, the professor and students, are working to create a better world, better environment, better community.

A line between students and teachers

Some professors distinguished the positive relationship with students from the concept of friendship. One said:

> I don't believe the role of a professor is to become a best friend with students. I don't think it is a job of a professor to have a goal to be liked by students. I think it has to be a mentoring situation. You can be interactive positively [but] you can't develop friendships, develop positive relationships. There has to be a line there because blurring the line creates a lot of problems.

Regarding the line between teachers and students, there were more comments from another professor:

> I think there is a line. I don't think that you are on an equal plane. The power structure dictates you're not. The bottom line is that you get the grade, you pay the money....I don't think that's bad. The teacher knows more about the subject matter....I feel perfectly comfortable with that. That's why I'm there. But it doesn't mean teachers know everything and students know nothing. That's not true either. That takes us back to that we work together, but we have very different roles, we come from very different places.

Awareness of differences among students

All the professors believed that teaching needs to be based on the recognition of the differences existing among students, including motivations, the ways they learn, prerequisite skills, personalities, and so on. A professor claimed:

> Students have different view points, get involved differently, learn in different ways. You've got to keep a very open mind about your students....I'm frequently surprised that my initial perception is not an accurate one....Holding onto your first impression could be a big mistake.

Although being sensitive to students' differences took extra time, they believed "it worth the effort." The mass lecturing professor asserted:

> I think a good instructor has to be sensitive to differences in people and look at differences not as deficits but is another perspective, another way of doing things. And those

differences and those perspectives have to be taken into account in order to produce a class climate that is also sensitive. Sensitivity and awareness are the two key issues for instructors in the classroom. You have to be sensitive to differences and you have to be aware how those differences affect individuals and how they affect the entire group because the differences I bring in will affect me as both a learner and facilitator of learning in the classroom.

A professor who has about thirty years teaching experience disagreed with the view of students as consumers at all. He said, "I have a traditional belief that you earn a degree. You're not buying a degree." He stressed that a student's interest in the class is the key to the learning process. However, he did not think those differences should be taken into account when judging students' achievement. The professor explained:

> I really teach the class for the ones who are interested in the class, but it doesn't mean I ignore those [who are not]. I don't try to draw their attention because one thing I continue to find amazing is how you can mis-perceive your students. I have students who look like they are sleeping in class but they end up doing very well in the course. ..So I'm very careful. I try not to be judgmental in the class at all.

What are students' expectations of college education?

Students' Attitudes Toward Learning

Many full-time college students have to work for 30 to 35 hours a week in order to cover their daily expenses that range from $600 to $800 dollars a month without including tuition. Students' lives do connect to communities and the larger society. Taking classes is only part of their lives, but an important one. Except for the track athlete, all the student interviewees had part-time jobs. One student who worked 35 hours a week talked about her motivation, attitude toward study, and relationship to professors. She asserted that because students "pay for going to the school" that means they want to get higher education at the school. Thus, she expected a good professor as:

> Someone who is going to make me think, make me want to ask questions; someone who makes things interesting so I'm not falling sleep during class or getting bored; someone

who I'm not going to complain about because they don't have any leeway when it comes to working things out, like, specially when you have papers.

Another student anticipated a good professor as:.

someone who listens to students' needs and concerns, who is open to new ideas and students' expressions; someone who is willing to work with students out of their own regular ways they do things....They need to understand that they aren't the only one that is teaching the student and that students have different ways of thinking.

Students carefully investigate each professor's attitude toward students' learning and consult with each other about whose classes they had better to take from. One described the situation before registration:

[Now] we are going to register for classes. In our hall we have sign up things put in elevators. Like, what teacher do you think is good? Then you put why. Some students come to ask you because you put your name there. Some students ask about your experience with the teacher and why you thought the teacher as that way. Because the comment [on a professor] is going to be different [by different students]. Because people learn differently.

The interview data showed that students have high expectations of professors. On the one hand, traditional students seemed to depend on professors' knowledge and teaching skills. A student said:

I like them to be reliable, to be resourceful in that area,...and have a structure in the class. And they follow along with their roles and criteria for the class, specifically, deal with individual instances that may arise.

On the other hand, non-traditional students needed more open minded professors to let them apply their own experiences to the classrooms. They liked to be recognized as knowledge creators rather than merely learners. A good teacher they like is:

Somebody who is open and listens to what the student has to say. If instructors expect us to listen to them, then the instructors should listen to what we have to say, because maybe the instructor will learn something from us.

The non-traditional student showed his dissatisfaction with current higher education settings. He proposed that college teaching must be student-centered. He claimed:

> You see, in my instance, I didn't come to the school from high school. I was in the world for a while, and then I came to the college. Most non-traditional students feel this way. They don't like to be dictated to....We are all intelligent creatures...Even from day one, if an instructor would ask the students an inquisitive question in just the right matter, the professor might be surprised at the response, maybe the student knows quite a bit, maybe the student has quite a bit of background at this area....Everything that relates to the social sciences can be achieved through group discussion. All the instructor has to do is to ask the questions. The instructor has the knowledge, they understand the theory of whoever. All the professor has to do is be creative, and think of a way they can draw the students' answers from what they are looking for. For example, don't tell me what is 'media reality,' [instead], 'what do you think media reality is? Why you're pretty close [to the concept]?

Regarding class organization, the non-traditional student preferred 100 percent discussion to any lectures, and said that "I hate lecture. I think everybody hates lecture." In order to accommodate discussion, as he wanted, the class size needs to be small, not over 20 students. He suggested:

> The room is small, you feel comfortable....The instructors shouldn't talk to us. They should ask us...let the students talk...[If we don't know,] we'll ask. The instructor could put them back to on the right track again. The smaller the class, the more one-on-one, the more intimacy there is between the students and professor. The larger the class, the less contact.

Another student, who likes open-minded professors, thought 70/30 percentage of discussion and lecture would be appropriate in college. She talked about her own experience in the classroom:

> When I sit there, other things enter my mind: what I will do after this class for the rest of the day; things I've got to do tomorrow....I'm not thinking about what they're necessarily talking about, specially if it doesn't interest me. If I know that I have to listen here for 20

minutes of the class,...then I'm more apt to want to listen. You can sit there for 50 minutes but not hear one thing that professor said. If they only talk for 20 minutes and then go into something else, a new activity, finding out what the students think about [the subject], or what they learn from there. It really encourages me personally to read my material before class and have knowledge of what's going on. If I know, I get to be a participant in discussing what's going on, otherwise by just sitting there listening to them to talk the whole time I wouldn't have to read before the class. Maybe, I'd probably just study for the test.

No doubt, the view of consumer culture in contemporary college was also presented during the interview with the non-traditional student. He criticized:

> More and more students are not going to college right way like they have in the past. You'll get more students like myself. If a student isn't learning, a student has negative thinking, and they are down on the subject. I feel that is the instructor's fault, or responsibility, because ultimately we are all consumers ...They don't like to see themselves as a business, but they like to see themselves as dictators, because they set themselves up there as a little miniature community government sort of thing....They don't see themselves as providing the service. For example, they don't allow us to use the equipment. They said, "You can't because you're a student." They meant "You work for me." I pay taxes for the state, and I'm paying to go to the school here. This is my equipment as well, not just professors' equipment. So the university [administrators] set themselves up for failure.

Professors' Experiences of Teaching in College

Back to the professors' side, it was not surprising that all the professors were concerned about being competent in their subject matter, constantly up-dating their information, and staying on top of their professional discipline. However, the most important virtue mentioned was a professor's fondness toward students and eagerness for teaching. A professor claimed that "I don't think you can be a good teacher if you don't like students." The more enthusiasm a teacher feels in teaching, the more effort he/she makes to understand students. They believed that:

A good professor is someone who encourages students to participate, who looks at where the students are coming from, what knowledge they have, what kinds of things they need to be able to do, and helps them in a variety of ways to get where they need to go. A good professor is one who recognizes there are differences in the way people learn, the way people interact, and looks at how best to meet the needs of students in ways which help students rather than calls attentions to differences....A professor should allow students to do the things in a manner that works for them, and encourages students to grow in their own way.

In the interactive teaching-learning atmosphere, professors were stimulated to meet students needs. A professor emphasized:

A good professor needs to connect the topic and the course to students' lives. If information is presented in isolation, it's not connected back to who they are, what they do, what they are trying to pursue as a career or what they'll be doing in a number of different avenues, such as consumer, citizen, as a practitioner. In this way, the students can see a much broad framework for what you're doing. That makes a big, big difference.

He pointed out the weakness in current curriculum, and said:

My greatest fear is that we create people, we produce practitioners. When they're going to the industry, and they have no idea whatsoever how their work affects society, or has an impact upon political process, upon children. We created the program and curriculum. When students go out, if they only know how to do specific functions and operations within the industry without being able to connect the industry to the macro picture or a much larger view, then we [as instructors] haven't done very much.

Defining "A Good Student"

Students' Perceptions

In the discussion of defining a good student, traditional students have accepted the criteria defined by the current higher education system. The student government officer listed the merits of a good student as those who are "willing to learn, reading and doing the things that are asked of you from the professor, open minded to new things, new ideas; giving effort to learning (that's the

reason you're here); and willing to work with different types of people and different types of professors."

The track athlete was taking 15 hours classes and ran 2.5 hours every weekday and an hour weekend days. She talked about how she balanced her time schedule for running track, going to church, traveling to sports events, meeting friends, and study. She defined good students as "students who are applying themselves and do their work, who turn it in on time; and ones that are willing to learn, ones that want to learn;...students that encourage the people around them and just do the best they can in the class." She is working hard to keep good grades, and said that "I have to keep on the time frame and make priorities for myself." She needed to say to herself that "This is the most important [thing] right now. That's what I'm focusing on." Yet, the non-traditional student expressed his challenge to the existing college system. He defined a good student as "somebody who questions the answer; somebody that doesn't necessarily take what has been said as the "gospel"; somebody [who] really has doubts about what has been said." He believed that most students accept things because it is easier than challenging the existing "gospel." He added:

> Anybody can crunch information and put it in temporary memory, but it takes a really good student to not just accept....The true academia wants you to question, but the way our society, our culture, our religion, is set up goes against that. That creates confusion....Based on his working experience, maybe the student doesn't embrace what the instructor says, but may have his own theory and beliefs. That's how the university is supposed to provide a learning environment.

Professors' Perspectives

From the professors' point of views, there were different emphases on the definition of "A Good Student." One professor thought, in general, "motivation, hard work, bringing prerequisite skills, and abilities and attitudes, would be important." Another professor did not want to judge a student in terms of grades and class performance. Rather, he saw a long-run performance that connected to graduates' professional success. He asserted his teaching philosophy:

I don't view any of them [students] as bad students unless they show no interest or no

effort in the class. Again, different people learn in different ways and in different times in their lives....What I look at is the effort, the ability, or desire....Someone who is showing that she is thinking about the subject matter, trying to process information, to perform some cognitive skills. I perceive that as a good student. I generally do not try to memorize, even to pay attention to students' grades until the end of the semester.

Another professor considered a good student not only as a learner but also as a thinker. She appraised "a good student" as "Someone who thinks; someone who demonstrates thinking, who asks questions...about concept; somebody who may just want additional information; someone who asks for qualification." Moreover, a professor stressed critical thinking skills.

I think one of the key things to me about a good student is someone who critically evaluates the information that was presented, someone who analyzes it, is not afraid to question and also tries to make connections between course content that you are covering and course content that may impact another courses or other parts of society.

The professor thought the college classroom continues with a two-way communication. He noticed that:

A good student is the one who is eager to learn the subject matter of the topic, the class subject material...also the one who attends to the readings on the time, keeps up on information, asks questions, one who is going to interact, to make the environment interactive rather than a one-way teaching avenue where the professor is supplying information and they are simply writing down and taking notes.

How is the classroom culture defined?

Some answers resulted from the observation and interviewing. The classroom culture was defined as *the interactive relationship between students and teachers, that students feel comfortable with their learning processes and that teachers believe effective for students' learning*.

The Observed Interactive Classroom Atmosphere

The interactions occurred in a combination of informal and formal, and verbal and non-verbal communication. In the observed classes, students were greeting or chatting with each other,

sometimes with laughing and joking, and it continued until the beginning of class. The professors also participated for a while before starting the classes. For example, in one class students were talking about their plans for the spring break. The formal conversations were related to course materials, such as assignments, research topics/projects, attendance, etc. In one classroom, at the beginning of the class, the professor asked students if they had any announcements. A student told his classmates that he would get a teaching job at the metropolitan area in October. Another thing noticed was that students and professors seized the few minutes before or after the class to ask brief questions or make appointments. For instance, one professor discussed a research project with a student after the class. Another professor distributed the handouts for computer registration guidance to students and announced the information regarding applications for scholarships. Even checking absences was conducted in a casual mode, such as "who is missing today?" or "please pass the sign up sheet."

During the classes, the interactions were mainly initiated by the professors. In a networking connected classroom, the professor periodically addressed the name of a student, Jim, who was taking the class in a remote site, and called the class' attention to Jim's responses to the lecture and class discussion. In other observed classes, the professors invited students' involvement by means of direct questioning, student presentations, or small group discussions. In such cases, the students' thinking and learning processes seemed to follow the professors' guidance. The professors, in turn, showed very positive attitudes toward students' activities in the classrooms. For example, the comments frequently heard were "Thank you, Stephanie, for sharing your experience with us"; "Sure, that's a good question"; and "You [your answer] might be right, but I go for others [answer]."

The Ideal of Classroom Culture

The student leader clearly defined the atmosphere as "an open atmosphere where you can express yourself and your ideas, just being able to feel *comfortable* talking in the classroom....That's being a very effective learning environment for me." Another student thought a *comfortable* environment created by a professor was essential to students' learning. He claimed:

If a professor doesn't make the students feel *comfortable* by asking them questions,

getting them involve, you are not going to have a relationship between the students and professor....You have to give the students confidence. If you don't give the students *confidence* they are not going to learn because they are going to be too intimidated, specially if they are new students....If you are not encouraged, you are not going to learn.

The professors strongly expressed that higher education exists in the *interactions* between teachers and students, whereby they "co-construct meaning and learning." This is a dynamic process, so "teachers are continually learning too." A professor described her ideal that "I want demonstration of knowledge and critical thinking to take place both in terms of interactions with me in class, outside class, in papers, in speeches and presentations."

Discussion

The Theoretical Implication for College Education

The Teaching-Learning Relationship in College

It showed a two-way communication relationship existing in contemporary college classrooms. Both students and professors expressed their common goal of college education that was for students to acquire knowledge, gain skills, and become responsible persons/citizens for our society. However, the approaches to reach the goal were somewhat different between the students and professors. The students talked about their desire to gain professors' attention and understanding, even friendship, while the professors thought that students' learning motivations played a very important role in college education.

The students' responses supported Loves' (1995) claim that an integration of intellectual, social, and emotional aspects in undergraduate student lives would increase students' learning effectiveness. On the one hand, students seemed to favor *Liberation Theory* that emphasizes participation, partnership, and dialogue that require establishing a conscious relationship between students and educators, based on mutual expectations and responsibilities (Love & Love, 1995). For instance, the student interviewees preferred to spend, at least, half of the class time on discussions. On the other hand, the students were more likely to rely on professors' attitudes

toward them than on their own responsibilities. Although they were concerned about professors professional competence, they frequently expressed their feelings about themselves, such as "confidence" and "comfortable." As Dewey (1954) points out, one of the primary mission of education is to enhance students' mental and moral development. One student interviewee indicated the negative impact of an instructor on a freshman's life. Due to the fact that the instructor frequently broke appointments and was disrespectful of students, the student thought that "if teaching the course was not the professor's priority, students would not take it seriously either." Moreover, students have their strategies to deal with a professor they do not like. As one student mentioned, during the pre-registration period comments and suggestions about professors were posted in student dorms. Further, the information collected via the interviewing with students showed that consumerism had a strong influence on college students. Especially, the non-traditional student strongly emphasized that professors need to provide services to students rather than "dictate" or "govern" students' learning activities.

The professors would like to apply *Constructivist* approach to their teaching. They saw themselves as facilitators or mentors of students' learning, and worked hard with students to co-construct meanings and learning. The professors showed their concerns about students as human beings with different motivations and learning styles. A professor said that "Sensitivity and awareness are the two key issues for instructors in the classroom." However, Love and Love (1995) assert that *Constructivism* is more interested in pedagogical approaches rather than students' social, and emotional aspects. The professors emphasized that students' responsibility is very important in the process of interactive teaching, and distinguished the differences between friendship and interactive learning. They did not like the consumerism idea in the college setting at all.

Also, there were differences between traditional students and non-traditional students. Traditional students were more likely to depend on professors' knowledge and skills, and expected professor's lectures and topics to stimulate their learning interests. On the other hand, non-traditional students were more likely to be self-motivated for coming back to school after working in the "real world" for a while. They needed more recognition of their experiences and

skills, and wanted professors to facilitate their learning needs rather than teach them how to learn. Unlike traditional students, the non-traditional student even did not think that he needed to learn all theories taught by professors and believed that students may have their own theories. In fact, many non-traditional students who came back to pursuit higher education degrees had specific expectations for their future jobs and promotions after graduation from the university. Apparently, there are gaps between students' expectations and professors' expectations, in terms of teaching-learning relationship in college education. Who should be responsible for narrowing down these gaps, professors, students, or college administrators? How to gain mutual understanding in order to bridge the gaps? These questions need further discussion.

Classroom Based Teaching vs. Computer Mediated Teaching in College

With the rapid convergence of computer and electronic media technologies, especially the development of the Internet, educational systems are facing a restructuring and reforming situation. Not only did multiple technologies assisted classroom teaching but also made homes and schools connected. Distance learning and virtual classroom teaching are a reality not an imagination anymore (Kurshan, 1993; Lenk, 1992, 1995; Means, 1993; Stanford Research Institute and Educational Development Corporation; 1992) . Under the powerful impact of new technologies, computer mediated communication tends to replacing face-to-face interpersonal contacts, so does to teaching-learning interactions in classrooms. While most of the discussions on new teaching technologies are focused on the improvement of teaching "knowledge" or of individual student's learning "knowledge," students' feelings and desires of getting professors' attention, and knowing professors and classmates are rarely mentioned.

Recently, the public is concerned about the overwhelming installation of computers in the classrooms of elementary and secondary schools. Michele Norris, a reporter from ABC, raises a question "Do the computers increased students' learning effectiveness?" In a conversation with Norris, a teacher in California was worried that "the machine [computer] is not going to look in the eyes of each one of the kids to know whether that kid has understood what you've said" (ABCNEWS.com, Washington, September 29, 1999). Thus, before adopting the virtual classroom structure in college, the issue raised by the present study needs to be taken into

account. Although new teaching technologies may enhance the effectiveness of passing knowledge to students, the lack of direct teacher-student contacts available in a classroom environment may cause learners' emotional feelings of alienation, isolation, or helpless. Consequently, those emotional problems may hinder students' learning process. Does college education aim to pass knowledge to students only, or to develop academically intelligent, psychologically healthy, and morally mature individuals who can function in society?

Suggestions for Future Studies

Although there have been studies concerning students' social and emotional influences on their learning process, students' relationship to instructors in and out of classrooms was rarely investigated. As a matter of fact, there are rules prohibiting interpersonal relationship (especially romantic relationships) between a teacher and a student in order to prevent the abuse of such relationship. There were also cases of teacher-student conflicts that were fairly studied. However, continuing exploration is needed to ascertain what might be an appropriate relationship between an instructor and students in order to enhance students' learning process without getting the situation of abuse or conflicts. As the daily increasement of on-line (WWW based) courses, we may think whether present college system could be replaced by a hyper-college or virtual college structure. Then, what the teacher-students relationship would be if the virtual classroom comes to dominate in college education?

Conclusion

All the discussions above were about the relationships between instructors/professors and students, about their feelings, comments, and suggestions, and between teaching and learning, about the interactions in classrooms. This is a case study with an ethnographic approach, so it is not supposed to apply the results to other colleges or universities. However, the author believes that the feelings and comments reported here call our attention to the classroom culture, and that the questions raised in the study are important and need further exploration. We need to see behind students' grades, class performances, and their sleeping eyes to their motivations/attitudes, confidences, expectations of education and career, dreams/ambitions, and even their daily lives.

We can gain mutual understanding with our students through interactions in class and outside class in order to enhance our students' learning process.

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